

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund

In the United States, Asian elephants are best known as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, captive elephants are primarily beasts of burden. An estimated 16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Ironically, it is the destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture, and the encroachment of human civilization that pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannas of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild—about half of which are found in India.

With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassava, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are killed each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants in connection with crop raids.

Poaching, the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones, poses a serious threat as well. Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants has left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tusker.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as “mukhnas.”

To combat these threats, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



Asian elephants

The 2006 Congressional appropriation of \$1.4 Million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund allowed the Service to support 25 crucial elephant conservation projects in Asia, including:

- Purchasing new vehicles as well as repairing older vehicles for the use of staff in Kaziranga National Park in India. By increasing the mobility and response capability of park staff, these improvements will enable the staff to better protect Asian elephants and prevent poaching.
- Creating a professional anti-poaching enforcement team capable of fully investigating wildlife crime around the Cardamom Mountains in Southwest Cambodia and bringing criminals to justice. These measures provide an effective deterrent to wildlife crime, applying lessons learned from the implementation of similar anti-poaching and trade units operating in other parts of Asia.
- Conducting an in-depth analysis of elephant population and human-elephant conflict in Mudumalai
- Wildlife Sanctuary in India. Elephant population analysis includes the use and evaluation of various methods of population estimation. In addition, this project develops appropriate human-elephant mitigation strategies including effective, low-cost crop protection through cooperation with local people.
- Working with internationally-known basketball star Yao Ming to launch a campaign of public service announcements, including billboards and films translated into Chinese languages, aimed at combating trade in endangered species and products – including elephant ivory – in China by reducing demand and raising awareness of the issue.
- Producing the “Friends of Wildlife” radio program in Laos. This radio program serves to increase public awareness and knowledge of conservation issues, including the illegal ivory trade. Additionally, it builds public support for Asian elephant conservation by helping to change local people’s perceptions of elephants in their region.
- Supporting the year-round operation of eight anti-poaching units charged with protecting elephants and other biodiversity in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in Sumatra, Indonesia.
- Protecting elephant corridors in India through the identification and management of wild lands of importance to elephants. By establishing these lands and helping to relocate local people, this project creates buffers to protected areas in the region, which both reduces human-elephant conflict and provides better elephant habitat.

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding History from 1999 through 2006	
Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	298
Total Number of Grants Awarded	171
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	100%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$8,316,993
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$7,853,831
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$458,335
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$10,362,752

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November 2006



Tusker in forest
 USFWS/Dave Ferguson



Sabah pygmy elephant
 Raymond Alfred